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## Grasso & Castillo, eds., THEOLOGY AND PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY: FOUR CONVERSATIONS

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a little less than fifty pages to this topic—a considerable amount given the length of the book. And that discussion is not especially noteworthy. The treatment Frances gives to the evidential value of religious experience, for example, involves only a brief (and somewhat condescending) dismissal of standard approaches (like reformed epistemology), with the remainder constituting Frances's own (to a large extent) highly idiosyncratic take on that issue (53–54, 88–92). The evaluation of standard theistic arguments, such as the argument from design and the cosmological argument, consist of more or less standard objections. But these objections (and the various possible responses to them) are much better discussed elsewhere.

On account of these and other reservations that I have about the book, I would (as noted at the outset) be hesitant to recommend it as a stand-alone introduction to the problem of suffering. Nevertheless, in spite of what I have said, there is much to be praised about the book. It does present a lucid and reasonably comprehensive introduction to the evidential problem of suffering. I could see myself assigning it to an introductory level course, provided that I supplemented it with other materials on that topic.

*Theology and Public Philosophy: Four Conversations*, edited by Kenneth L. Grasso and Cecilia Rodriguez Castillo. New York: Lexington Books, 2012. 214 pages. \$27.99 (paperback).

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This edited volume is a collection of papers presented at the University of Chicago Divinity School in 2003. The four conversations facilitated by the book's editors address the possibility that theology and theologically informed moral reflection may contribute to "the contemporary quest for a public philosophy capable of sustaining and advancing America's ongoing experiment in self-government and ordered liberty" (ix). The conversations are organized in sets of responses to four key addresses: "Perils of Moralism" by Charles Taylor (1–48), a reflection on the "Theistic Account of Political Authority" by Nicholas Wolterstorff (49–86), the interrelationality of political consensus and religious commitment by Robin Lovin (87–134), and a reflection on "moral traditions" (in dialogue with Alasdair MacIntyre) by Jean Porter (135–180). The remaining contributors are Kenneth Grasso, Fred Dallmayr, William Schweiker, J. Budziszewski, Jeanne Heffernan Schindler, Joshua Mitchell, Charles Mathewes, Jonathan Chaplin, Michael L. Budde, Eloise A. Buker, Christopher Beem, and Peter Berkowitz. In sets of three, these contributors offer responses to the four primary essays. Jean Bethke Elshtain concludes the volume with a

reflection on the highlights of the work as a whole. Assumed in all the conversations is the expectation that religion will neither “disappear nor cease to play a public role in the future” (xv). The goal is to converse over the best way to engage that role in an “anomic democracy” like ours, one framed by an ever-increasing sensitivity to “megarights,” the insular, hyper-individualized, and exaggeratedly absolute belief that “my rights” trump any concern for personal, civic, and collective responsibilities.

The conversation revolving around Taylor’s opening piece reflects the centrality of individualism in the collection. Taylor argues that Western religious cultures tend to reduce spirituality to moral obedience, based on the assumption “that morality can be defined in terms of a code of obligatory and forbidden actions which can be generated from a single source or principle” (1). This tendency, which Taylor calls “nomolatriy” (law-worship), can be found in both religious and philosophical institutions. In our society, even the most “liberating” codes (e.g., “speech codes” on college campuses) lead to a certain entrenchment of fundamental principles, the most prominent of which is the constitutionalization of individual rights. For Taylor, the best response to constitutionalized individualism is to redeem “the vertical dimension” of existence. If we are having trouble escaping the crippling effects of code fetishism in our culture, it is because our typical response to moral differences “consists in nothing more than the statement of our own counter-code” and the eventual provocation of *Schadenfreude* over against “compassionate understanding” (19).

The three responses to Taylor’s essay endorse Taylor’s analysis of constitutionalized individualism, yet each make some suggestion for a more robust theological turn as a response to nomolatriy—a strategy used by many of the essays throughout the volume as a whole. Kenneth Grasso suggests that nomolatriy may be attributed to a cultural identity unfolding “within a horizon decisively shaped by nominalism” and relativism (23). Grasso says Christianity offers an alternative to the dead-end of individual rights. Law and freedom, on a Christian reading, are not dichotomized, as they are in secularism. Although generally appreciative, Fred Dallmayr critiques Taylor’s quick and suggestive style. He suggests that Taylor’s arguments may be assisted by a more robust uptake of the Judeo-Christian tradition, particularly the commands to love God and others. William Schweiker points to four problems with Taylor’s argument. The first is a historical critique, the latter three are “traps” that threaten the role of religion in combatting the flat morality of nomolatriy. These can be fixed only by theologians, not simply because it is theologians who inevitably fall into the traps, but because it is only by way of an explicitly religious perspective that Taylor’s proposal will be realized.

In the second major essay, Nicholas Wolterstorff offers a refined adaptation of the “traditional understanding of state authority as consisting in the right of the state to command obedience of its subjects” (53). The essay proceeds in two parts. First, Wolterstorff problematizes the typical theories of state authority associated with the humanist tradition: consent

theory, contractarianism, and conventionalism. All are considered inadequate to the unique dynamic between the power of the state to manipulate its citizenry and the quasi-voluntary status of the citizen. As an alternative to humanist accounts, Wolterstorff offers a critical appropriation of the Pauline and Calvinist "divine deputy model." Wolterstorff calls his alternative the "delegation model." Like the contemporary phenomenon of staffing delegations in an office with multiple employees, the "delegation model" emphasizes that there may be multiple layers of separation between the head of the organization and that organization's delegates. The "moral legitimacy" of a certain occupancy is compromised when either (1) the office itself is morally illegitimate or (2) the person occupying that office ought not to occupy it.

As above, and like Wolterstorff's essay itself, the responses to Wolterstorff's article push the discussion into explicitly theological arenas. J. Budziszewski's primary critique is that Wolterstorff chose an important but rather arbitrary source to flesh out this theological notion. He suggests that a less questionable jump from biblical to modern thinkers could be mediated by Thomas Aquinas. Jeanne Heffernan Schindler turns to a "less reactionary" theory, that of Yves Simon in *The Philosophy of Democratic Government*. Simon's proposal is not based on the deficiency referenced by sin but on a more "positive" theology of creation. Joshua Mitchell offers the most substantial critique, suggesting that humanistic notions of government are merely "the other side of the coin" in the top-down theory. He uses Hobbes and Locke to point out that humanist theories actually rest upon a theological foundation. Even if "we moderns" do not agree with the reasons used by Hobbes and Locke, we can still see that it is necessary to found a theory of consent on some mechanism discounting the proximal forces that make up our identity. Ultimately, what consent theory enables is a theory of political representation, a biblical notion.

In the third section of the book, Robin Lovin offers a "typically and happily lucid" (Charles Mathewes's phrase, 111) account of current religious approaches to public debate. Situating his summary in the hope that "questions about the requirements of faith and about the requirements of public life" need not be separated as a matter of necessity (89), Lovin names three categories: the Witness, exemplified by Stanley Hauerwas; the Realist, exemplified by Reinhold Niebuhr and theologians in the Niebuhrian trajectory (Lovin himself included); and the Prophet, exemplified classically by Martin Luther King, Jr. and more recently by the variety of liberationist theologians who continue to play an important role in global theological discourse. Lovin's analysis concludes with a handful of hermeneutical observations that assist in navigating these approaches. Perhaps most astute is Lovin's observation that it is not only theological difference which gives rise to these categories but varying assessments of the public discourse itself: for the witness, there is no single narrative capturing society's identity; for the realist, there is a cautious optimism about the possibility of integrating religious and political dialogue; and for the

prophet, society yields a “rather bleak assessment of present possibilities,” while religion provides a hope for “a fundamental transformation of that society” (101).

The different responses to Lovin’s essay reflect the multiple points of view (all internal to Christianity; more momentarily) in the work as a whole. Most appreciative is Charles Mathewes, who calls Lovin’s summary of Hauerwas “better than any single account Hauerwas has given of himself” (111). Still, Mathewes questions whether Lovin unnecessarily separates what should be kept together, namely “a single strategy for positioning Christian speakers as regards the public sphere” (110). The key issue for our political climate is not whether religion should be included in public life “but whether there will be *enough* religion in public life—or whether only the most simplistic and often theologically dubious voices will thrive there” (116). Jonathan Chaplin generally agrees with Lovin’s conclusions but questions Lovin’s assumptions about the nature of political communities. Lovin “enters the question from the side of the subjective intentions of religious citizens” (121), but perhaps it is more appropriate to enter from the “objective” side of structural characteristics internal to the organized (and not merely contingent) public community. Michael L. Budde asks whether Lovin’s notion of postliberalism is correct. For Budde, Hauerwas’s rejection of liberal politics is a result not merely of his opinions regarding “the public” but also of his belief that Christianity is so radically different from politics. “Nationalism,” says Budde, “is far more sectarian and fragmentary than is the worldwide body of Christ” (130).

The essays in the fourth and final section of the book represent the most substantial engagement with the tradition of liberalism in the U.S. Ironically, this conversation begins with an analysis of Alasdair MacIntyre. Jean Porter initiates the discussion by offering an extended analysis of and response to MacIntyre. Dealing mainly with *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, Porter begins by summarizing MacIntyre’s problem with public discourse and the role of moral traditions in addressing this problem. For MacIntyre, the generally incommensurable, if not outright acrimonious, differences among the traditions that inform shared moral reflection may be navigated by locating reasonableness *within* those traditions. Rational standards emerge from a unique history of conversations that have given way to the acceptance of new standards internal to each tradition. Porter problematizes MacIntyre’s account of inter-tradition conversation by suggesting that his proposal does not hold, relative to discussions of morality. MacIntyre’s theory works when rival, scientific traditions are engaged with one another, but morality is not reducible to science. Porter’s suggested alternative is to highlight the possibility that—even though we express morality in an indefinite variety of ways—we may at least recognize a “framework within which we can identify different moralities as variant forms of what is broadly the same kind of phenomenon, namely the expression of behavioral patterns proper to our kind of creature” (147). If participants in the public conversation can

admit such a similarity, they will enable the “informed tolerance of difference” that represents the best of nineteenth-century liberalism.

Eloise Buker follows Porter’s lead, identifying science as the key to the debate between Porter and MacIntyre. The hinge-pin for determining more and less productive ways of adjudicating inter-tradition disagreements is the degree to which differing options mirror debates in the sciences. Likewise, Christopher Beem follows Porter’s lead by comparing and contrasting MacIntyre with Isaiah Berlin. Beem’s conclusion is that liberalism “by disposition and training” is better able to carry out the inter-traditional phenomenon MacIntyre and Porter both envision. Peter Berkowitz claims that liberalism has been fruitful in its attempt to produce the “thick and vibrant moral tradition” that defines contemporary America (167), but there are also significant problems in our democracy, ranging from income inequality and bad public education to salacious and harmful behavior. Berkowitz ultimately defends the importance of keeping liberalism central in our democracy, since the prioritization of the individual reflects a foundational liberalism driving American democracy as a whole.

Overall, Grasso and Castillo organized an impressive gathering of scholars for their conference—a veritable “Who’s Who” of theologians and religious scholars engaged in the debates surrounding religion and “publicness.” Even so, we may offer two points of critique. First, one concludes the book wondering if the conversations may have been more fruitful if the list of contributors would have included representative non-Christian, or even non-theological, points of view. (Though not all of the essays are explicitly theological, they all represent a theological agenda.) From my survey, only Joshua Mitchell’s response to Wolterstorff mentioned religious pluralism, and this was offered primarily as a final thought. As cultural critics continue to analyze what must now be called “pluralisms” (plural), it is more and more difficult to locate “a” notion of religion relative to American politics, much less in our increasingly global society.

Second, we would be remiss not to mention the gap between the original presentations of the papers and the publication of the book—nine years. (This fact is also noted by Jean Bethke Elshtain in her conclusion, 179.) I offer this observation more as a lament than a substantial critique. Of course, academic publications may often be delayed. This is a typical casualty of the system. Yet here, the delay does not substantially weaken the timeliness of the essays, which perhaps says as much about the intractable dysfunctionality marking American politics (the context of the volume) than it does about the essays themselves. Grasso and Castillo, in fact, situated their dialogue as a response to this dysfunctionality. The increasingly aggressive interest groups that populate public discourse have led to a paralysis producing “a far-reaching crisis of confidence in our political system” (xv). Late as the essays may be, if they help re-establish this confidence by loosening the political gridlock on Capitol Hill and in the body politic, the conversations in this volume are certainly welcome.